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The Representation of Captives in Foreign Writings during the Ottoman Regency of Algiers

صورة الأسرى في الكتابات الأجنبية بإيالة الجزائر العثمانية

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Abstract:

The issue of captives in the early modern period constituted one of the most significant humanitarian and diplomatic concerns shaping foreign relations between the traditional maritime powers and the Ottoman Porte in general, and the Ottoman Regency of Algiers in particular. This issue became especially prominent with the intensification of maritime jihad (corsairing), which represented a major source of revenue for the Regency's treasury through goods and human captives. In the absence of international laws regulating captivity, captives were considered the property of the sailors of the Regency, with the Dīwān sharing in the spoils and profits, leading to their depiction as human merchandise. Owing to the sensitivity of this issue, Western writings varied in their representation of captives in Ottoman Algiers, particularly regarding their origins, numbers, methods of sale in the badestans, living conditions, labor, and ransom practices.

Keywords: the early modern, captives, the Ottoman Regency of Algiers, the badestans, the most significant humanitarian and diplomatic.

المخلص:

تعتبر مسألة الأسرى في العصر الحديث من أهم القضايا الإنسانية والدبلوماسية التي شغلت العلاقات السياسية الخارجية بين القوى البحرية التقليدية والباب العالي عامة والجزائر خاصة ، ولاسيما مع تصاعد عمليات الجهاد البحري الذي شكل أهم موارد خزينة إيالة الجزائر مما يشتمل عليه من بضائع وبشر ، ولأنه لم توجد قوانين دولية تتحكم أو تقنن القضية أصبح كل ما يقع في الأسر ملكا لبحارة الإيالة يشاركونهم الديوان في الغنائم والأرباح. حتى أطلق على الأسرى البضاعة البشرية ونظرا لدقة الأمر وحساسية الوضع ، اختلفت الكتابات الغربية حول الأسرى في الجزائر العثمانية من حيث أجناسهم وعددهم وطريقة بيعهم في البادستانات، وحياة الأسر و الأعمال التي كانوا يقومون بها، وفديتهم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: العصر الحديث المبكر، الأسرى، الوصاية العثمانية على الجزائر، المناطق الحدودية، أهم القضايا الإنسانية والدبلوماسية.

1. INTRODUCTION

The vast majority of captives in the Ottoman Regency of Algiers were Christians of diverse ethnic origins. It is difficult to determine their exact ethnic composition due to their large numbers over a period spanning three centuries, on the one hand, and the great diversity of European nationalities in particular, on the other. For instance, and without being exhaustive, Italy at the time was composed of several

principalities, each of which maintained representation in Algiers, in addition to the presence of other nationalities that later disappeared or merged with others to form unified states.

2. Nationalities of the Prisoner

Through foreign historical writings, it is possible to mention several ethnic and national groups. We find the Scandinavian countries represented by a Danish–Norwegian consul (Ødegaard, 2016) Italy, Sweden, France, Spain, Portugal, England,

the Netherlands, Russia, Germany, and Austria are also mentioned. These writings agree that the vast majority of captives were European Christians. Among them, the most numerous groups were the Spaniards, Portuguese, Italians, and Germans (Hebenstreit, 2014, p. 32).

Among the captives we also find individuals from Russia, the British Isles, the Scandinavian countries (Sweden–Norway–Denmark), the Netherlands, and France (Wolf, 1986, p. 208). Among the ethnic groups mentioned are: Portugal, Corsica, Livorno, France, Rome, Austria, Naples, Genoa, Sardinia, Palma, Malta, Greece, Spain, Sicily, the Netherlands, Prussia, America, Russia, Flanders, and Denmark. (Devoulx, 1853, p. 134). The origin of these captives was mainly linked to maritime jihad (privateering), whether as a result of naval battles or the pursuit of European ships, or through raids on the coasts and islands of the western Mediterranean basin and the North Atlantic.

3. Categories of Captives:

The trade in Christian captives constituted one of the main sources of income. Each captive had a specific value depending on his status. The qabudan (ship captain) required a ransom of two thousand five hundred qirsh, while his assistant, as well as the shipbuilder or surgeon, required one thousand five hundred qirsh each. As for the sailor, he was required to pay one thousand *qirsh*. The release of German captives was usually more expensive than that of others due to their skill in maritime affairs. (Hebenstreit, 2014, p. 42)

The revenues from privateering related to captives were subject to an initial sale through auction in local markets, known during that period as *badistans*¹, and a

¹ Al-Badistans were the main slave markets where the sale of captives took place. The term is a compound Persian word from *bazz* (cloth) and *stan* (“place”). Originally, it referred to the cloth market, but later the term was also applied to the slave market due to the large crowds gathered there, similar to what occurred in cloth markets.

second stage when they were redeemed by clergymen or through Jewish intermediaries. Philippe Gosse mentioned that institutions were established in both the Eyalet of Tunis and Algiers with the aim of handling “living goods,” which can be classified into four categories (Belhamissi, 1984, p. 27).

- **Mistances** (craftsmen and skilled workers).
- **Marinier**, used to serve corsair sailors on ships and galleys.
- **Caravanes**, employed as porters.
- **Poussabarres**, assigned to less strenuous tasks.

According to this classification, some captives became the property of the *Baylik*, while others became the property of private individuals. It should be noted that captives of high status, such as physicians, clergymen, and officers, were exempted from labor except in cases of delayed ransom payment. As for the conditions of this sensitive category, there is little doubt about the uncertain fate that awaited them in the Eyalet. Consequently, everyone who went through this experience wrote about it, expressing the feelings it aroused in them and the sorrows and resentments it generated toward Islam in general and the Ottomans in particular.

Wolf mentioned that when a captured ship arrives at the port, the captives are led to Qasr al-Jninah or the “Dar al-Imara,” where the Pasha or the Dey assesses his share, which ranges between ten and twelve percent of the total number of captives. He also retains the right to purchase any slave at the price reached at auction by the first buyer. This concerns the Sultan’s household. As for the Baylik of the Eyalet, the Beys also receive a share of the captives. The remaining captives are then taken to the *Bagno*² (prison) (Metzan, 2011, p. 18)

² The prison was a building designed to admit light inside according to the Ottoman method. Its inner courtyard measured eighty feet in length and twenty feet in width (one foot equals 33 cm), with a height reaching eighty-five feet. It had two corridors in which one could walk,

A mark was placed on the captive to distinguish him from other categories. Several sources mention this mark that was given to the captive upon entry into prison, most notably Laugier de Tassy and Venture de Paradis (Venture de Paradis, 1989, p. 154). The Dutch captive Gerrit Metzan, who was imprisoned in Algiers from 1814 to 1816, states: "Thus we arrived at the prison, the usual residence of slave captives, where our guide forced us inside, registered our names, and gave us the usual badge of slavery, which was a light iron placed on the leg." (Metzan, 2011, p. 25).

On the following morning, they were offered for sale in the main market. Dr. Ander Hill reports that he was stripped of his clothes except for what covered his private parts and was put up for sale "... together with women and men ..." (Wolf, 1986, p. 210). This took place after a special examination of the captives—their hands, teeth, general health, estimated age, and the determination of the ransom value—while the sale itself occurred after the noon prayer.

Captives who were not selected by the Dey to work as guards or servants, and who were not purchased by merchants, became the property of the state. They were then used for labor in stonework along the roads of the Eyalet, on state estates, or in the *Dar al-Sina'a* (arsenal) in Algiers and the shipbuilding workshops. The peak period for acquiring captives was at the beginning of the sixteenth century. (Spencer, 1980, p. 131)

Therefore, Western sources

each ten feet wide, with adjoining rear alcoves used as sleeping quarters for the slaves. Each alcove was five and a half feet long and two feet wide. Each corner measured twenty-four feet in length, eight feet in width, and twelve feet in height, accommodating between thirty-six and forty slaves, with five sleeping on top of each other. This description is according to Gerrit Metzan, *Journal de captivité à Alger (1814–1816)*, translated into French by G.-H. Bousquet & A. v. Bousquet Miranchole (Algiers: Édition Houma, 2012), p. 18.

exaggerated their estimates of the number of captives in Algiers, particularly in the seventeenth century, placing them between 20,000 and 60,000 captives.¹³ (Lanfreducci & Bosio, 1925, p. 540). According to some reports and testimonies, although this figure is exaggerated, it nevertheless indicates the large number of captives in the Eyalet of Algiers and the difficulty of accurately counting them, given the intense human movement that characterized Algiers during this period as a Mediterranean city with extensive diplomatic and commercial relations with European cities.

4. Conditions of the Captives:

Most Western sources addressed the condition of the Christian captive with a degree of extremism and exaggeration regarding the situation of captives in the Eyalet. They portrayed the life of captives in Algiers as one of suffering, humiliation, and degradation. Other sources, however, dealt with the condition of Christian slaves more objectively. Among them is the English source *The Present State of Algiers*, which states: "They are, for the most part, treated better than others in the remaining possessions of the Grand Seigneur, as they benefit from managing shops and taverns, or from practicing their handicrafts, in return for paying a monthly sum to their owners that does not exceed three dollars per month... In this way, several thousand captives obtained their freedom through their own means. They also enjoy the freedom to recite their prayers and to hear them throughout the week, each in his own prison or in places where this service is permitted... They also have a hospital..." (Philips, 1676, pp. 92-93).

Schaller adds on this subject: "...female captives were always treated with the respect imposed by their gender, and the tasks required of men were not excessively arduous. Captives who found a guarantor to ensure that they would not escape were allowed freedom of movement wherever they wished in return for paying 75 centimes per month..." (Shaler, 1982, pp. 98-99).

Sources mention that in each consulate

there was at least one monk who performed religious rites for the nationals of his country in the Eyalet, such as the French consulate, which had two, and the English consulate, which had a Protestant monk.

Peyssonnel notes that “Mr. Duchan, who is today—1725—the ecclesiastical envoy to the kingdoms of Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli, has a house that serves as a place of gathering for Roman Catholics. (Peyssonnel, 1830, p. 458).

A captive from the Greek (Orthodox) community in one of the prisons of the city of Algiers used to perform the rites of his sect there.¹⁷ Father Dan, the author of the *History of Algiers*, used to celebrate Mass in his residence, which captives attended. (Dan, 1646, p. 43).

They also had a cemetery in which Christians buried their dead near the sea³ (Wolf, 1986, p. 235). King Charles IV of Spain purchased a small plot of land for a considerable sum (Historical and Geographical Description of the City of Algiers and Its Surroundings, 1830, p. 15) in which all Christians were buried without distinction of rank. They were buried in the sand at a short distance from the sea, free of charge. (Cathcart, 1982, p. 86).

However, Laugier de Tassy mentions that this cemetery—located at Bab El Oued—was established with the permission of the Pasha in 1571 for the guide of the Austrian Crown Prince Don Juan of Austria, who had been a captive in Algiers, by purchasing a plot of land that was turned into a Christian cemetery at Bab El Oued.

What distinguished it from other cemeteries was that funeral processions of captives were prohibited from performing religious rites outside the cemetery. The body of the deceased was transported and accompanied by those related to him, and the monk would receive them at the

cemetery gate in order to bury the dead according to religious rites.²² (Laugier de Tassy J. P., 1992, p. 290)

Father Pierre Dan, however, reported something different from what some other writers such as Laugier de Tassy mentioned. He stated regarding burial practices in Christian cemeteries that the Algerians treated them badly: they spat on the dead, insulted them by calling them dogs, and threw mud, dirt, and stones at them. This, he says, forced them to bury their dead very early in the morning. Accompanying them with the cross and holy water was not possible, which meant that the deceased was accompanied only by a few of his friends, while the monk awaited them in the cemetery to perform the burial rites and recite prayers. (Dan, 1646, p. 41).

The Dey Chaaban stated in his letter to Louis XIV on 23 July 1691: “...my dearest friend, in this land—Algiers—there are cemeteries for foreigners and for Christian captives, whereas in Marseille there is no cemetery for Muslims. Here, a hundred captives die each day, and they are buried in cemeteries designated for them according to their religion, where their book is read over them and their prayers are recited.” (Qannan, 2010, p. 166).

We believe that there is no torment more severe than depriving a person of his religion. Yet Christian captives enjoyed religious freedom, as noted by Metzan: “When the morning of 20 July 1815 dawned, one of the slaves called out to us... and took us from our sleeping quarters at the very moment when a loud voice was calling the Catholic slaves... to attend the performance of their religious rites...”²⁵ (Metzan, 2012, p. 19).

Diego de Haedo stated: “Once again, we observe tolerance and freedom of belief in the city of Algiers in the sixteenth century, at the same time when, in Catholic Spain, adherence to another religion led to being burned...” (Haedo, 2004, p. 227).

5. Ransoming of Captives:

This divergence in addressing this issue is subject to several political and

³ The Christian cemetery was outside Bab el-Oued.

religious motives, and its context shows nothing but the desire to eliminate the rule of the Ottomans in the Eyalet, as they were the main concern that occupied European public opinion. This was due to their adoption of maritime piracy as a fundamental principle to secure the state treasury's revenues. Consequently, ransoming operations became one of the Eyalet's main sources of income. The sale of captives of all affiliations and ranks was merely a commercial transaction that required the payment of various fees and duties: for every 10 bejos, 1 bejo (i.e., 10%) was paid to the state treasury, and for the ransom receipt, 12 rials, half of this amount went to the treasury. (Devoulx, 1853, p. 58)

Regarding general ransom, there was no price difference between officers and ordinary individuals. However, in the case of private ransom, the Dey demanded 4,000 dollars for each officer or ship agent, and 2,000 dollars for each private captive. Payments were also made for any prisoner who died after treaties were concluded. Dey Muhammad Uthman Pasha was able to obtain the required sums for all American captives who died after September 5, 1795. (Stephens, 2007, p. 260)

For captives of the Beylik, ransom payments were made in cash in rials (small dirhams, 60 cm)²⁹, and the receipt was submitted by members of the Diwan to the Bayabashi and the port commander. Additional mandatory gifts (Etrennes) were paid by religious men, estimated at a thousand sa'im per captive, equivalent to 60–70 rials (36 francs), in addition to other gifts, including 1 rial per captive for the Bayabashi, ¼ rial for the Khawja al-Rokamji, ¼ rial for the War Spoils scribe, and ¼ rial for the accompanying soldiers responsible for security and religious men. (Devoulx, 1853, p. 24)

The dues did not stop there; additional fees were collected: the Dey received 2 rials for each large captive, the scribes and Khawja al-Daftar received 1 rial, the port commander ½ rial, the naval scribe 1/8 rial, while English and French translators

received 1 rial, and the Pasha's translator 1/8 rial. Tassy mentions that after agreeing on the price, fees known as the "right of the door" were paid (Laugier de Tassy J. P., 1992, p. 168).

- 10% of the ransom amount for customs.
- 15 piastres paid to the Dey, known as the "Pasha's caftan right."
- 4 piastres for the senior scribes.
- 7 piastres for the port captain.

Money carried as ransom for captives was subject to a 3% customs duty (Laugier de Tassy J. P., 1992, p. 174). Thus, the sale of captives was part of the Eyalet's commerce, generating customs duties, with the Beylik entitled to 5 rials (3 francs) for every 100 rials (60 francs). The money could not be used before paying the customs fees.

The division of a captured ship's cargo followed specific rules. After the state's share, which belonged to the Dey, was allocated, costs were paid to the port authorities and customs traders. (Halaili, 2007, p. 142).

It is worth noting that the ransom amounts were not fixed but fluctuated depending on the level of maritime piracy and the effectiveness of treaties and peace agreements between the Eyalet and Western countries.

6. Duties of the Captives:

Captives held many important duties and tasks. Their significance lay in the fact that they occupied sensitive positions in the palaces of rulers and among the (bourgeois) classes. Among these positions:

- **Treasurer of the Bey (Khazindar al-Bey):** This role was equivalent to a Minister of Finance. The position was held by Tidina, whom the Bey of Algiers brought from the city of Algiers due to the need for a captive skilled in reading and writing. Bey Muhammad al-Kabir preferred French captives over others.

A large number of captives were present in the palaces of the Dey, the Beys, or other authorities. Among the most important positions they held:

- **Head of the Chefs (Abd Masihi):** Responsible for the kitchen in the Dey's palace, under whose command were approximately thirty-three Christian slaves from various religious sects and nationalities. (Cathcart, 1982, p. 25)
- **Cooks:** These were slaves. Simon Pfauffer writes:

"...We were taken to the treasurer's house, provided with the clothing of slaves, and worked as cooks in the minister's kitchen... Our duties included cleaning and washing the palace with water, lighting fires in the kitchen, slaughtering sheep and chickens, cleaning legumes and vegetables and dishes, all household utensils, and generally performing all household chores." (Pfeiffer, 1974, p. 18)

The kitchen contained fourteen slaves, including Americans, Spaniards, Italians, Greeks, and Dutch. (Pfeiffer, 1974, p. 18)

Slaves were not allowed to leave the palace except twice, specifically on the day after the major Christian holidays. (Cathcart, 1982, p. 26)

- **Head of the Servants in the Palace:** This was a Christian who had the traditional right to present greetings and show respect to the Bey and the Caliph when visiting the Dey. The head of servants carried a caftan and a register of honors from the Dey to those who were granted it.
 - **Head of Christian Employees:** A Christian whose duty was to manage and supervise the employees in the Dey's palace. He and his assistants extracted a considerable amount of wealth through extortion from nobles and prominent figures visiting the Dey. (Cathcart, 1982, p. 26)
- Physician:** A notable example is the captive Simon Pfauffer, who initially worked in the treasurer's kitchen. After treating the treasurer, he was given a gold watch and appointed as his personal physician. He also treated other palace members when they fell ill. (Pfeiffer, 1974, p. 29)

For the Bey of Constantine, there were Italian slaves, and his surgeon was of Neapolitan origin. (Vayssettes, 2013, p. 59)

- **Irrigation Engineer:** A Greek slave from the island of Tinos, captured thirteen years earlier, named Wasl, aged forty, with expertise in irrigation works and canal construction. He contributed to significant public works in the Eyalet. (Pfeiffer, 1974, p. 53)

7. Captives According to Western Sources:

Year	Number of Captives	Religions / Ethnicities	Source
1580	25,000	European Christian	Diego de Haedo
1587	20,000	—	Lanfredutch i Bozio
1598	15,000	—	Giovanni Magini
1619	32,000	—	Gramay
1621–1624	8,000	Catholics	Mascarenhas
		Protestants	
1625	25,000	—	Salvago
1634	25,000	Catholic	Father (Dan, 1646, p. 320)
Between 1631–1638	60,000	—	Francis Knight
1640	40,000	—	Jose de Tamayo
1640	30,000–40,000	Catholic	Emmanuel Dranda
1656	30,000–40,000	—	Sanson
1660	35,000	—	Dauvety
1660	5,000	—	Louis Doummy
1662	12,000	12,000 Catholics	Father Oufrey
1665	40,000	European Christian	Duval
1671	14,000	Catholic	Father Louvachy
1675	10,000 or 12,000 (Arvieux	—	Chevalier Darfieu

Year	Number of Captives	Religions / Ethnicities	Source
	, 1735, p. 225)		
1676	18,000	–	G. P. (Philips, 1676, pp. 91-92)
1677	3,000	–	Robert Cole
1678	20,000–30,000	–	Du Fercour
1683	35,000–40,000	–	Manson – Mallet
1684	35,000	–	Betis de Lacroix
1693	2,000	–	Venture de Paradis (Venture de Paradis, 1989, p. 154)
1698	2,600	–	Lawrence
1700	8,000–10,000	–	Comlan & de Lamon
1701	3,000	–	Lawrence
1719	4,000	–	Godfeil
1723	9,000–10,000	–	Fau
1729	Over 5,000	–	Vander Aa

The table above, extracted from several Western sources, provides overall estimates of the number of captives between 1580 and 1729, a period during which piracy, also known as the “maritime jihad,” flourished over a century and a half. However, these figures should be regarded as approximate or reasonable estimates, particularly for the period between 1578 and 1684. This is due to the Algerian-Spanish wars and the significant pirate activity in the Mediterranean. In addition, the Eyalet’s land and naval conflicts with Christian states throughout most of the sixteenth century were the primary source of revenue for the state treasury.

During this period, piracy, despite its great importance, was a secondary element within these wars. After 1580, piracy gradually replaced conventional military operations and continued to grow until it

reached its peak shortly before the mid-seventeenth century. Consequently, approximate estimates varied: in Algiers, the number of captives was estimated at between fifteen and twenty thousand at most.⁴ In 1587, both Bosio and Lanfreducci estimated the number of captives at around 20,000. (Lanfreducci & Bosio, 1925, p. 540). Giovanni Magini provided statistics for 1598, estimating 15,000 captives for Algiers alone and 32,000 for the Berber regions.

Mascarenhas mentions an approximate number of captives, stating:

“...In Algiers, if we do not count those belonging to the Church of Rome, there are about eight thousand Christian captives, and if the plague had not claimed many of them, there would have been far more...” (Mascarenhas, 1993, p. 74)

This, without excluding Christians from various denominations (Protestants), brings the approximate number to between 10,000 and 12,000. A decline in the number of captives is also noted starting from 1623, alongside a decrease in the population during a period marked by widespread epidemics and unrest. Dumay adds that after the epidemics of 1654 and 1663, which claimed the lives of one-third to one-half of the population of Algiers, the number of captives consequently dropped significantly to 15,000. (Dumay, 1666, pp. 1-13)

8. Conditions of the Captives:

It is noteworthy that the conditions of captivity largely determined the situation of captives in the Eyalet, which depended on the relationship between the captive’s state and the Eyalet, as well as the effectiveness of consular diplomacy in determining their status. According to Cathcart, captivity in Algiers was “a piece of hell” due to the harsh conditions endured by the captives, which had little to do with humanity, even if there were differences in religion. He vividly

⁴ In comparison with the captives in Algiers, there were around ten thousand captives in Tunis, and in Tripoli of Libya between four hundred and five hundred captives.

describes the prison atmosphere:

“...The greatest nuisance in this prison arises from keeping lions and tigers, which emit a foul odor from their cages... I saw with my own eyes no fewer than 27 lions and tigers kept in this prison... What exacerbates the situation is that these predatory animals... come out of their cages and attack the prisoners, having actually killed several slaves (Cathcart, 1982, p. 60), who did not dare to kill them even in self-defense... (Cathcart, 1982, p. 60). The excrement of these animals provides tasty food for rats, the largest I have ever seen, which some poor slaves often used to stave off the gnawing hunger⁵. Some slaves even ate cats out of necessity, and when I asked a French captive what he would do with a skinned cat, he replied: ‘One must sustain life’ (Cathcart, 1982, p. 60)

Overall, the general framework of the captives’ lives was dictated by fate and dominated by the circumstances of the Eyalet. In the eyes of the rulers of Algiers, the enemy remained an enemy even when under their control. James Wilson Steven did not differ from Cathcart in describing the situation of captives, stating:

“The slaves sold within the country (captives) are subjected to hard and unusual labor... If they do not provide sufficient service... they are certainly beaten. Some of these slaves walk barefoot in the fields, tending livestock, pulling the plow, and performing all other kinds of hard labor (Stephens, 2007, p. 262).

He adds:

“Many captives work in other parts of the country; some in Mount Bouzaréah, some in the various gardens of the resident consuls in the countryside, and others in the navy. On Fridays, they are put to work at Bab el-Oued... (Stephens, 2007, p. 262).”

Despite this labor, the captives received only a small amount of food in return, primarily a portion of bulgur mixed with a little rancid butter (Cathcart, 1982,

pp. 60-61), which had an unpleasant smell, worse than animal fat. As for its cleanliness, it suffices to say that rats, mice, and other insects and animals were often found in it. Nevertheless, hundreds of these wretched captives, during their captivity, would sit around the table and consume this bulgur as if it were fine pastry (Cathcart, 1982, p. 60). On Fridays, they received only a single loaf weighing no more than 12 ounces, and bread was distributed randomly on workdays⁵⁸ (Cathcart, 1982, p. 60).

Inside these prisons, stolen chickens and rabbits were cooked over a low fire because the masters did not care much about feeding their slaves, who in turn received no proper meal except when sentenced to hard labor on roads and fields. On these occasions, they were given two pieces of biscuit per day and a small quantity of barley flour. (Chevallier, 1993, p. 59)

In this context, the fate of captives in Algiers followed three possible outcomes:

- **First:** Their state intervenes and ransoms them, ending their suffering.
- **Second:** They die due to disease, beatings, or hard labor.
- **Third:** They spend most of their lives in the Eyalet under an uncertain fate due to their state’s failure to secure their ransom.

However, although most of these writings distorted the image of Algiers and portrayed it in an unfavorable manner, some fair-minded writers refuted these allegations and presented a more positive image of Algiers and the Algerians. Among them was the historian Laugier de Tassy, who responded to these accusations in his introduction to the work of a Dutch author, particularly regarding religious fanaticism. In his reply, he stated:

“In the field of religion, we find the finest and most admirable quality to be tolerance, and this tolerance exists in Algiers. Its inhabitants deserve gratitude and recognition. Moreover, the government of Algiers behaves excellently in this regard, as it grants complete freedom to religious believers residing in its territory, and the more a person is known for piety, the greater their esteem, respect, and protection.”

⁵ It refers to the severe hunger and malnutrition suffered by the captives in Algiers.

(Bouabdelli, 1973, pp. 125-153)

Likewise, the captive Tidna, in his memoirs—after becoming treasurer to Bey Muhammad al-Kabir, Bey of the West—expressed his astonishment at what he heard from Christian slaves upon his arrival in the city of Mascara, saying:

“Everything these young men told me seemed puzzling to me and only increased my astonishment further. I said to myself: what is all this? Where is that barbarity and inhumanity that most of Europe attributes to this people to whom I now belong?”. (Amiraoui, 2003, p. 59)

In addition to religious figures, European consuls who held official positions in the city of Algiers recorded their memories, documented events, and narrated matters related to Algiers of which they were eyewitnesses. However, these writings were limited to the cities in which they resided, as they did not travel nor give consideration to the lives of Algerians in the interior and rural areas. They viewed the inhabitants of the Maghreb as a source of misfortune—deceptive, lazy, greedy, and ungrateful—an image inherited from their compatriots who had previously written about Algiers. (Belhamissi, 1984, p. 71)

The issue of captives’ conditions varied across Western and local sources, as well as Ottoman documents. Most sources reveal the great diversity in the living conditions of these captives (men and women), particularly in the writings of Christian religious figures responsible for ransom operations. These individuals often fabricated horrifying stories intended to influence public opinion and collect donations for the redemption of European captives. Such accounts differ significantly from more objective and realistic sources. These narratives cannot be relied upon for establishing historical facts; however, they may constitute a subject of historical anthropological study with its own methodological approaches to textual analysis. They may also serve as material for semiological and sociological analysis concerned with the study of political and

ideological propaganda.

What is particularly noteworthy is that these accounts concerning the conditions of captives—constructed by clergymen and monks—ultimately became, by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a pretext for the French colonial project culminating in the occupation of Algeria in 1830.

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